To Jean Koch

WESTERN TANAGER

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A High Country Birding Bonanza At Mineral King

by George San Miguel

Photos by Larry Norris

Perhaps few birders in Southern California realize what a prime area for finding High Sierran birds was saved when Mineral King was included into Sequoia National Park in 1976 by an act of Congress. Open meadows, various kinds of coniferous forests, alpine lakes, snowy peaks, and streamside thickets supply the necessary habitats for many high elevation and "north country" birds. Some of these birds are at or near their southern breeding limits in Mineral King. A wide variety of trails ranging from gentle to strenuous provides access to these birds and their habitats. Since the area is mostly wilderness, becoming familiar with Mineral King requires more effort to get there and get around than the average drive-in park destination. However, for those seeking fresh birding opportunities away from the heat and smog of Los Angeles, the rustic isolation of Mineral King is well worth its inconveniences.

Depending on the previous winter's snowfall, rangers try to have Mineral King open by Memorial Day Weekend (park info. (209) 565-3341. To get to Mineral King, take highway 198 east from Visalia and drive beyond Lake Kaweah and Three Rivers. About a mile before reaching the southern entrance to Sequoia National Park, past the Hammond Fire Station, is a small green sign pointing the way east to Mineral King. The 105-year-old road is narrow, 25 miles long, steep and winding, with many blind curves and about three unpaved miles near the end. Much care must be used driving here. Radiator water is available along the way up the steep rugged canyon of the East Fork of the Kaweah River. However, trailers and very large motorhomes are not permitted on this road.

The lower third of the drive winds slowly through foothill oak woodlands and chaparral. For safety's sake, use roadside pullouts when watching for birds. Many familiar southern California birds are found here. From May to July, Iazuli Buntings are often seen perched on branches or telephone lines along this stretch of road. Further along, past Lookout Point, stands an impressive granite wall. Stop underneath the cliffs to watch darting White-throated Swifts and listen for singing Canyon Wrens up in the rocks.

Blue Grouse can often be heard drumming in the Red Firs along the Eagle Lake Trail

Higher still the road continues through Canyon Live Oak and California Bay-laurel mixed with pine. After almost an hour's drive, you reach Atwell Mill Campground, situated in the deep shade of Giant Sequoias and other tall conifers. Northern Goshawks are sometimes seen soaring low above the forest canopy. In fact, a pair used to nest every year right in the campground. The area is also inhabited by many of the expected middle elevation forest birds.

A few miles further still, the road comes to the tiny private community of Silver City. A small store provides a limited selection of food, camping supplies, gasoline, hot showers, cabin rentals, and meals. If you chose to stay in Silver City, be alert for early evening hoots and whistles from a breeding pair of Spotted Owls, which have lived in the neighboring forest for many years.

Mineral King lies another three miles up the road. As you emerge from the dense conifer forest watch for a spectacular waterfall down in the main canyon to your right. The valley above the falls is your destination, high on the southwestern tip of the Great Western Divide. For those camping, drive beyond a group of cabins called Faculty Flat, turn right and cross a bridge into Cold Springs Campground. Situated along the banks of the river under the shade of firs, pines and cottonwoods this is, to many, the nicest campground in the park. The Mineral King Ranger Station is back up the road another 100 feet. Stop in and find out abour ranger-led nature walks and campfire programs, browse the trail maps and

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books on display, ask for a bird checklist and ask about trail and weather conditions. Mineral King is 7,500′ above sea level. Nights are cold in June, days are rather warm in August, and cold rainy spells can last for days, but the summer weather is usually ideal.

At the end of the road, one mile beyond the ranger station, is a pack station where you can rent a horse or mule by the hour, day or week. Visit the corrals to see Brewer's Blackbirds, White-crowned Sparrows, and Purple Finches foraging on the ground. Before August, Brown-headed Cowbirds are often seen here as well.

The relatively flat floor of Mineral King Valley allows for easy hiking for those not yet used to the altitude. A two mile hike begins in the campground, follows the river upstream, and loops back along the road. The rushing river, cascading tributaries, and many springs provide water for lush groves of aspen and cottonwood, impenetrable willow thickets, and mushy wet meadows packed with wildflowers. Grassy areas are best for finding a Blue Grouse hen foraging with her chicks for seeds and tender shoots.

Mornings before the middle of July are alive with the sound of birds song in meadows and willow thickets. Nashville, MacGillivray's, Yellow and Wilson's Warblers plus White-crowned, Fox, Lincoln's and Song Sparrows can be clearly viewed by standing still and partly hidden and delivering chips, twitters and buzzes into the thickets. A great place to try this in June is a sunny thicket in front of a porous limestone deposit a quarter mile east of the ranger station north of the road. In the past, this thicket has also been occupied by as many as three singing Swainson's Thrushes. Later in the summer These same willows become foraging grounds for upslope mi-

Mineral King Valley, view north to Timber Gap

grants such as Orange-crowned Warblers and House Wrens along with juvenile sparrows and warblers from springtime's nests.

The many groves of aspen and cottonwood are also quite rewarding to birders. Neat rows of holes are riveted on tree trunks and limbs by Red-breasted Sapsuckers. Northern Flickers drill nest holes in the soft wood. The leafy branches provide perches for flycatching Western Wood-pewees, leaf-gleaning Warbling Vireos, and sprightful Evening Grosbeaks.

The river, running through the lower valley, is good for watching American Dippers forage on the rocks and in the turbulent waters. After the start of July, Violet-green Swallows are sometimes seen swooping low over the river and adjacent thickets and meadows. High overhead, Golden Eagles are seen regularly over the main valley and the surrounding ridges and canyons.

The valley floor also contains open brushy areas of manzanita, currant, and sagebrush with scattered trees. These areas are prime habitat for ground foraging Mountain Quail, Green-tailed Towhees, and Fox Sparrows. Lesser Goldfinches begin arriving from the foothills late in June, and form large flocks in the scrub with Pine Siskins by mid-July. The small pink tubular flowers of currant bushes are a favorite among Mineral King's hummingbirds. Male Calliope Hummingbirds are often seen defending brushy areas, forest openings, and the tops of willow thickets. By the end of June they are challenged by a slowly increasing wave of male Rufous Hummingbirds. Occasionally, an Allen's Hummingbird is also seen. By mid-July, however, all adult male hummingbirds have migrated south of Mineral King, though large numbers of female and immature Rufous Hummingbirds continue to pass through all summer.

Most trails to the surrounding high country rise quickly from the valley floor. However, most people can make a round trip to at least some of the nearer alpine lakes in about eight hours, even at a slow pace with frequent rest stops. The Tar Gap Trail runs through mostly such forests where Hairy and White-headed Woodpeckers, Red-breasted Nuthatches and Brown Creepers search tree bark and limbs for insects. Also under the shade of the canopy, the Hammond's Flycatcher. Townsend's Solitaire and Yellow-rumped Warbler can be viewed flycatching. Abundant Mountain Chickadees glean the evergreen foliage and are joined in August by dispersing Hermit and Orange-crowned Warblers. While once hiking this trail, I was stooped upon by a male Sharp-shinned Hawk in defense of his nesting territory.

Sawtooth Peak, el. 12,343 feet above sea level, dominates many views around Mineral King. Rosy Finches nest in its crags.

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Every so often, the Tar Gap Trail dips into a cool creek drainage where wet soil favors the growth of Lodgepole Pines. In these areas, Williamson's Sapsuckers and Pine Grosbeaks are sometimes seen. An even better place to look for these two species is in the Lodgepole Pine/Red Fir forest in the vicinity of the Eagle Sink Holes along the Eagle Lake Trail. Pine Grosbeak families have been seen here low in trees and foraging on the ground or snow. Eagle Lake, at the end of this 3½ mile trail, is 10,100′ high. The Cassin's Finch, Mountain Bluebird and Dusky Flycatcher can be seen among the open stands of Lodgepole and Foxtail Pines next to the sky blue lake.

Also beginning in Red Firs, the Eagle Lake Trail forks early on. One route leads to the flowering meadows and bare white marble slopes of White Chief Canyon. A pair of Red Crossbills has been seen extracting seeds from Lodgepole Pine cones next to the lower meadow. The upper canyon is usually occupied by Mountain Bluebirds in open stands of Foxtail Pines while Rosy Finches forage on the lingering snow fields. The Rosy Finch is widespread in Mineral King's alpine areas, but their local abundance varies from year to year.

Though more difficult goals, Upper Monarch Lake and the southern approaches to Glacier Pass are also good for finding Rosy Finches. If you try this route, you'll first cross Monarch Creek at Lower Groundhog Meadow. Black Swifts are sometimes seen circling over the meadow about an hour after sunrise. The swifts are likely roosting or nesting in the cliffs next to the rushing falls above the meadow.

To the north, the short but steep Timber Gap Trail switchbacks through many habitats including Red Firs. Within the forests, male Blue Grouse are often heard drumming. Tree tops along forest edges are used by Olive-sided Flycatchers. At Timber Gap, Williamson's Sapsuckers and Black-backed Woodpeckers have been seen in the forest. Very rare in the Sierra Nevada, a Black-backed Woodpecker has also been seen in the open Red Firs along the Farewell Gap Trail south of Franklin Creek, an area frequented by noisy Clark's Nutcrackers.

Observations at Mineral King, on and off trail, have yielded over 100 species, some as unlikely as a Phainopepla, a Say's Phoebe at 10,400′, and a breeding pair of Gray-headed Juncos. So let the rangers know what you've seen during your visit. No one trail during any part of a summer will yield even a third of the checklist. To get most from Mineral King, hike several trails during a long stay. The refreshing display of high country birds alone will be enough for the newcomer to return time and again.

For me, Mineral King is a living symbol of California's surviving wildlife and wilderness ecosystems. It's an extra special place, like a precious gem on the crown of the mighty Sierra Nevada. After your first visit, I know you'll think so too.

George San Miguel

Details on Details: Describing a Bird Part II

By Chuck Bernstein
in consultation with
Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn

THE UPPERPARTS

At the rear of the head is the nape. A patch of color here is referred to as a nuchal marking. The Chestnut-collard Longspur in alternate (breeding) plumage comes immediately to mind as an illustration, but the most striking and far-ranging examples are found in the woodpecker family.

Dropping down, the back of the neck of "hindneck" is useful in identifying some species. One that comes to mind is the Cassin's Finch, on which the birder looks in the hindneck area for the gray-brown contrast to the red cap on the male. Below the neck is the back. This is an area usually exposed even when the wings are closed. Some birds with strikingly colored backs are, in the east, the Wood Thrush with its rusty color and, in the west, the diminutive but busy Chestnut-backed Chickadee.

The term "mantle" is used primarily with gulls. While this term has been used in North America to denote the broad area of the upperparts including the upperwing coverts, scapulars and back, its use by Peter Grant in his book "Gulls: A guide to identification" is restricted to what we've termed the "back" above.

A good show of the upper as well as the lower back may be seen on a dowitcher taking flight. The point of the white triangular mark visible on these birds is the lower back, while the wide region of white below that is the rump. Also we look for a contrast between a grayish back and a greenish rump on a female-plumaged Western Tanager.

The birder should learn to distinguish between what is the base of the tail (including the coverts) and the rump on a bird. The rump is just below the back and just above the first tracks of upper tail coverts. Our Rose-breasted and Black-headed Grosbeaks sport strikingly white or tan rumps (males). The Northern Harrier has white upper tail coverts. The Rough-legged Hawk has white upper tail coverts, but the base of its tail is likewise white, creating a wide white patch above the black terminal band.

The rump, readily apparent when the wings are spread, is a highly-prized mark and used extensively in bird identification. This is particularly so inasmuch as the birdwatcher so very often snatches a glimpse of the bird as it is *leaving*. A yellow rump alone does not identify a Yellow-rumped Warbler; many birders feel this was not aptly named, inasmuch as there are six or seven *Dendroica* warblers with yellow rumps. But catching that color on the rump in winter, especially in the west, can obviate time-consuming combing through a flock, and in general makes birding much easier. On shorebirds the white rump quickly identifies the turnstones.

TAIL AND THEREABOUTS

For a bird the tail is a steering device, a counterweight or balance, and more lift surface. For birders, the tail is of special interest because we frequently rely on that part to assist in identification. We look for white outer tail feathers in the Western Kingbird, for undertail spots in certain warblers, and for a particular distinctive shape in some bird groups.

Like the wings, the tail of a bird is opened and closed. As the tail closes, the outermost quills or feathers successively fold beneath those closer to the center of the tail. This means that the underside or ventral surface of only the two outermost tail feathers can be seen on a bird perched overhead, its tail folded in. Looking down on a bird from above, visible is only the topside or dorsal surface of the two central tail feathers (inner and outer webs of about equal width), and perhaps the outermost edges of the outer webs of others, until and unless the tail is flicked or spread.

As is true of the wing, the tail feathers—from six to 30+, depending on the species, but usually 12 in number—are composed of a shaft, an inner and an outer web. Progressing from the central to the outer pairs of tail feathers, the outer webs become narrower and narrower relative to the inner webs.

Thus, should you find yourself out there studying a Western Kingbird that is perched above you, the white outer webs of the two outermost tail feathers, at the bottom layer of the folded tail, will be easily seen. And although the outer webs of the outer rectrices are usually visible, should you be peering down at the kingbird, and it is not fanning its tail, you might not see the white outer tail feathers you are looking for.

The fact that the tail feathers fold in from the outside toward the center creates another point of concern. When you hold a handful of playing cards spread or fanned out so you may easily see what is in your hand, the top edge creates an arc or semicircle. After you close your handful of playing cards, one folded in over the other, you see the top edge as straight-across or squared-off, and the many cards in your hand are still the size of a single playing card. This handful of cards approximates one side of the bird's tail or one half of the rectrices. Though a bird presents a rounded tail in flight, the folded tail on the sitting bird may actually be rounded, notched or evern squared off (like the top edge of the closed playing card hand). The "sure" mark once taught, that the obvious difference between Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks was that Cooper's had rounded tails and Sharp-shinneds had squared-off or notched tails, has proven inconsis-

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tent. That character is the value but is not alone determinative. The more telling mark to distinguish betwene these two species is the relative length of the tail and the length of the neck in relation to the rest of the body. Cooper's is by far the longer both fore and aft.

Nevertheless, tail shape can be very helpful in sorting our who's who in various families of birds. Certainly the spade-shaped tail on a raven sets it immediately apart from the squared-off rudder of the American Crow. Up near the Arctic Circle on St. Lawrence Island the Eskimos refer to the three jaegers as the "Knife", the "Fork" and the "Spoon". primitive but apt nomenclature for the Long-tailed, Parasitic and Pomarine.

We look for spots ont he spread tails of warblers. Inasmuch as the spots are largely restricted to the inner webbing of certain of the outer tail feathers only (depending on the species) the spots will not be visible from above unless the tail is spread.

All of the adult *Myiarchus* flycatchers (Great Crested, Brown-crested, Ash-throated and Dusky-capped in our country) have two entirely dark central tail feathers. It is the five feathers on either side of these that have rusty color. Juveniles have entirely rusty tails only until they molt into first basic plumage, whereupon their central tail feathers attain the dark, dusky color of the adult's. The rusty color, however, is on the inner webbing only, the outer webbing remaining very dark. Thus, from below one sees a rusty tail on a perched *Myiarchus* (excepting Dusky-capped) with its tail folded. From above this rusty is seen only when the tail is spread.

Just as on the wings, there are upper tail coverts and under tail coverts, greater and lesser, on most birds. The white U-shaped band seen on the upper surface of the Greater Shearwater in flight just above the black tail is not a rump patch but in fact the upper tail coverts. The coverts on the underside of the tail are observed more often and are of more interest to the birdwatcher. The feathers comprising the undertail coverts function to protect the underside of the tail. If studied well, these coverts can and should be useful in identification in the field. The Connecticut and Mourning Warblers, both skulkers in the underbrush, have especially long undertail coverts; indeed the Connecticut's yellow coverts reach very close to the tip of the tail in both sexes and in all seasons, and are perhaps the longest of all North American warblers.

The tail on a bird often "does its own thing" independent of the rest of the bird, or so it seems. In the field it should be watched to see if it is flicked by quickly raising and then lowering, behavior distinctive of many *Empidonax* flycatchers, or lowered first and then raised, distinctive of the Gray Flycatcher as well as our abundant Kestrel. Of course if you have a little bird which flicks its tail *and* wings constantly in a nervous frenzy you probably have a kinglet (but beware an especially fidgety Hutton's Vireo!).

Finally, merely because of bunch of feathering is at the rear end of a standing bird, the careful birder knows that it is not necessarily the tail. It is worth repeating that the closed, folded wings cover and hide most if not all of the tail in many species of gulls, terns and shorebirds; in long-winged species the primaries (wing-tips) extend as far to the rear, and in some species farther, as the well hidden tail. At the extreme, the "tail fan" of a peacock isn't the tail at all, but highly modified upper tail coverts!

THE UPPERPARTS

For those who look at birds the underside or "front" is the area most easily and often visualized. This is obviously so because more often than not we are looking up at a bird, either perched, roosting or feeding, in a tree or in flight overhead.

White chins, and often throats as well, are common, even among species having otherwise dark upperparts. Our thrashers are all white-chinned, although some show darker streaking over a white base. We look for the distinctive contrasting white chin on a Cassin's Kingbird as opposed to the pale gray "washed out" chin and throat on the Western Kingbird. Although not pointed out in most of the popular field guides, and so almost unnoticed by the birding world, most Arctic Loons bear in winter what is easy to call a "chinstrap" across the white underside of the neck.

From the chin, the underparts proceed from the throat to th breast and belly. These terms are clearly illustrated in bird guides and should cause little confusion. But other more specialized terms can be baffling. Northern Flickers and Horned Larks wear black "bibs", in the form of a crescent across the upper breast. Males of other species, such as the Hooded Oriole and the House Sparrow, have more extensive black bibs which extend to and include the black chin. The male Dickcissel wears his short black bib hanging from its malar stripes like a pair of suspenders. The spring male McCown's Longspur sports a short bib across the upper breast, while the male Chestnut-collared Longspur in the same plumage has the same bib extending down to the belly and flanks. The term "hood" also has no real nomenclatural significance in birds. It refers to a solid patch of coloring over the entire head, or sometimes just over the neck an crown. A male "Oregon" Dark-eyed Junco bears a true "hood" (often likened to an executioner's). The Yellow "hood" of the Yellow-headed Blackbird is marked with black in the lores and around the eyes. The yellow "hood" of the Hooded Oriole does not cover the entire head; nor does the black "hood" of the male Hooded Warbler.

The "sides" of a bird actually comprise the sides of the breast and, posterior to that, the flanks. The rufous flanks of the Rufous-sided Towhee are conspicuous, but one must look carefully for the buff-pink wash on the flanks of the Louisiana Waterthrush which aids in distinguishing that species from the Northern Waterthrush.

Below the belly is the vent, merely the opening on the extreme rear underside of the bird. This is protected (covered) by an anal circlet of feathering immediately forward of the first tract of undertail coverts. This tuft or circlet is in some cases colored quite differently from the remainder of the underparts; though not shown in most field guides, this circlet is bright yellow in the Yellow-headed Blackbird, although the adjacent undertail coverts are black.

In some species the undertail coverts, or at least their bases, are the same color as this tufted patch, giving birders a good field mark known as the crissum. Distinctively marked crissums offer the birdwatcher a wide array of rufous hues as an aid in identifying several thrashers, including the California and particularly the Crissal, which species derived its name from the distinctive rusty color of its crissum.

THE HEAD

I don't mean to be flip, but if it's a question of heads or tails, the heads have it. On our North American species they come in an array of shapes and sizes that boggles the imagination, from the vest-button size on a Calliope Hummingbird, mounted just above the back, to the feathery softball size mounted on a long and expandable piece of flex pipe that forms the uppermost part of a White Pelican.

On many birds the key to identification is on the head. Think of the many warbler species—the Red-faced and the Townsend's, just for starters—where the head marking is critical and may be the most colorful part of the bird).

Head *shape* is by itself engrossing, and descriptions could fill a book. The birder looks for the flat head to differentiate the Canvasback from the round-headed Redhead, and the pointy pate of the Lesser Scaup to distinguish it from the rounded baseball-shaped head of the Greater. And how the head is mounted could fill another book on either art appreciation or bird topography. Consider the vast range between the setting of the skull on the long but crooked neck of the Double-crested Cormorant and the "no-neck" bull-shouldered Black-shouldered Kite!

Furthermore, the head supports the bill. Now there's an economic fact of life! And just as the media is the message, the bill or the beak is the bird. The highly specialized feeding habits of different species have resulted in bills varying in form from the knife-billed Black Skimmer's to the conical seed-eating Pine Grosbeak's. Here too, is another whole book!

The head, and sometimes the neck, also contain or support many extra appendages or accessories. There is the red casque frontal shield on the Common Moorhen, the cocks-comb and red warty wattles hanging from the

male Turkey, the big red balloon gular pouch on the courting male Magnificant Frigate bird, the crest which may be lowered or raised at will on the Pileated Woodpecker or the Hooded Merganser, the nasal tufts on many woodpecker species, and the rictal bristles around the gape of flycatchers, nightjars and others.

Aside from the specialized-for-feeding shape and length of the bill, the birdwatcher should be aware of the importance of the relationship of the bill to the head, i.e. where and how it is attached. This can be useful in distinguishing a bird's identity, such as the Horned (more of a straight slant) from Eared (meeting at a high angle) Grebe.

Head markings are as helpful in identifying species as is a good road map in a foreign country. But unless all birders use the same name for each marking, descriptions will be garbled and useless, obnoxiously contaminating the literature. Sharing in common the correct nomenclature, so every birdwatcher knows what part is being referred to, can and surely will help in field identification; it will help the individual note-taker as well as the person to whom the description is passed on, be it the regional editor, birding buddy, or records committee secretary. Here are listed these marks in common usage among North American birders along with some relevant species on which that marking is readily apparent:

CROWN: White-crowned Pigeon
FOREHEAD: Tufted Titmouse
CAP: Wilson's Warbler (male)
CROWN STRIPE OR MEDIAN LINE: White-crowned Sparrow
LATERAL CROWN STRIPE: White-crowned Sparrow (the black stripes bordering the white crown stripe)
SUPERCILIUM OR EYEBROW: Waterthrushes
EYESTRIPE OR TRANSOCULAR LINE: Chipping Sparrow
LORES: Black-throated Gray Warbler (yellow spot)
MASK: Common Yellowthroat (male)
EYERING: Connecticut Warbler, Western Flycatcher
SPECTACLES: Solitary Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat
MOUSTACHIAL STRIPE: Clay-colored Sparrow
MALAR OR WHISKER STRIPE: Rufous-crowned Sparrow
EAR PATCH OR AURICULAR: "Black-eared" Bushtit

For some reason the moustachial and the whisker or malar stripes have become blurred and used interchangeably in some sections of the country. This can be confusing, and a distinction should be made between the moustachial stripe, which is the lower border of the auricular (ear) patch, and thus starts above the gape of the bill, and the malar or whisker stripe, which originates at or below the gape. As to the fine distinction between a crown and a cap, we say if the entire crown is involved it is the crown; if the bird wears merely a beanie, it is the cap.

Conservation Conversation

by Sandy Wohlgemuth

For a Change Some Good News . . .

The California Parks and Recreation Department has recently bought Malibu Canyon. Nine hundred acres of this lagoon to Piuma Road just south of Tapia Park is now public land. A hiking trail will eventually be built alon the creek.

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State officials have approved the purchase of 381 acres of land overlooking Tarzana. An exclusive development, which would have put 212 new homes west of Reseda Blvd. straddling Mulholland Drive, fell apart at the seams. The property, valued at least at $11.5 million, will be sold to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservance for an incredible $1 million. The Conservancy, a state agency, is expected to hold the land for the Santa Monica Mountain Recreation Area. It will be a link in the chain of parcels of land that will connect it eventually with Topanga State Park. This momentous event may quash the proposed Reseda-to-the Sea road that would have served the defunct development. If the highway is built it will be an environmental disaster.

* * *

Things are looking up for urban parks. The unlamented James Watt had an inexplicable aversion to national parks where they are most needed, and gleefully cut off all money for land acquisition. His successor, William Clark, while no environmental ball of fire, has at least been on speaking terms with Watt's "environmental extremists" and a change of attitude is evident. The Administration has approved $5 million for the Santa Monica Mountain Recreation Area which, though it is a token grant, is an encouraging development. Anthony Beilenson, who fathered the SMMRA, is working on legislation for a larger appropriation. Happily, the effort to preserve the magnificent hills that give Los Angeles its unique character among the world's cities has become a bipartisan cause. Most congressmen whose districts border on the Santa Monicas, including Republicans, are supporting the national recreation area. Republican Senator Pete Wilson has responded to continued public enthusiasm for more open space and less development by adding his name to the list. With the long-term committment of Alan Cranston, there is now a solid California front in the Senate to fight for the urban park concept.

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Hundreds of letters from all over the state influenced Governor George Deukmejian to sign a bill putting a bond issue on the June ballot to buy land vital to endangered and threatened wildlife. This is the first bond issue in California history exclusively for purchase of wildlife habitat. L.A. Audubon's letter-writing network contributed strongly to the size of the pile of letters to the governor on this issue. Now we have to get out there and convince the public to vote for it.

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THE LEGS

Leg color may be improtant in distinguishing similar species, but should be used cautiously. Because their feeding habits lead shorebirds into mucky areas which may coat or stain the legs, color may be unreliable as an identification character. Still, when you clearly see yellow legs on a small shorebird you should check further for Least Sandpiper or Piping Plover, or other species which show that color.

Excepting the few three-toed species, all woodpeckers have two toes pointed forward and two backward. Thes strongly clawed toes, when splayed outward, assit in climbing, aided by a strong sharp-quilled tail which functions as a climbing brace. The Jacana has evolved very long toes an long straight claws which enable it to walk on lily pads to reach invertebrate food. Swimming birds who must find their dinner in water (loons, cormorants, scoters, etc.) have evolved webbing between their toes to facilitate propulsion.

Passerines have three toes pointed forward and one pointed backward at the same level. When landing on a perch, as the leg bends with the weight of the body, the long cord running down the back of the leg changes length, thus clamping the rear toe tightly against the three toes in front and on the other side of the limb or perch. An automatic lock-on for a sleeping bird.

But then, to discuss the adaptive evolution of tarsi (plural of tarsus, the most visible portion of the leg that lies between the foot and the "knee"—actually heel joint) would require yet another whole book. For the birdwatcher it should be helpful to note that some hawks wear feathering to the "knee" (such as the widespread Red-tailed Hawk), whereas others (such as the Rough-legged Hawk) have tarsi which are feathered clear to the toes—a good mark. And yet another cover-up.

Field Trip Report

by Wanda Conway

Your response to the recent membership survey gave Field trips top priority!

The Field Trip Committee (Gayle Benton, Jean Brandt, Ruth Lohr and Sandy Wohlgemuth) studied your requests for expanding both the length and variety of trips, and took note of your interest in conservation through carpooling, enticing leaders with remuneration, better advance notification, etc. We are attempting to meet these needs.

The hardest thing to decide was whether to even have weekend trips. It has been difficult to find leaders who have the exceptional knowledge and expertise to lead trips of long duration, and who are also willing and able to donate the required time, effort and expense. After considerable analysis and discussion the committee made its recommendations, and the Board adopted a proposal on a trial basis. As is done on pelagic trips, participants on longer trips will share in the expenses of planning and leadership.

You will notice some forthcoming special trips described in this month's calendar. If these are well received, the program may be expanded. Some trips under consideration are to: (1) Crowley or Honey Lake for Sage Grouse performing their mating dance on the leks, (2) The Carrizo Plains, for Sandhill Cranes and raptors, (3) Yosemite, for Great Gray Owl, Pine Grosbeak, Black-backed Woodpecker and other high mountain specialities, (4) San Joaquin Valley Refugees for waterfowl and raptors in the winter, (5) Anza-Borrego in early spring for reptiles, flowers and early migrants, (6) Salton Sea for shorebirds in breeding plumage in migration, (7) Various desert oases for migrant waves and vagrants. These are only a few of a myriad of possibilities.

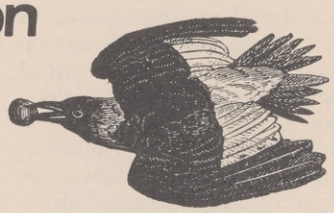
If you have some suggestions, would like to help out in planning, or are interested in leading either local or weekend trips, please contact one of the committee members.

The weekend trips are not meant to compete with the professional tour groups with their wide variety of amenities. They are designed only to bring together some birders who are interested in exploring new areas and seeing some different birds, under the guidance of an especially knowledgeable and experienced leader, for a nominal fee.

My appreciation to the Board and all of you for contributing ideas, information and help, particularly the Field Trip Committee members and former chairman Ian Austin, for the valuable computerized material and groundwork he provided for this proposal. And a very special thanks to all the leaders for making field trips possible!

Birds of the Season

by Hal Baxter and Kimball Garrett



The brevity of this month's column underscores the predicted slow pace of the late winter/early spring period. Birdwatcher activity centered around the monitoring of lingering wintering species and the recording of our earliest spring migrant species. **Rufous** and **Allen's Hummingbirds,** always amoung our earliest migrants, were widely reported. These days, with increasing numbers of wintering Allen's, it's difficult to monitor the spring arrival of this species. A clue, however, is that as January and February progress it becomes increasingly easy to record this species around flowering chaparral plants and tree tobacco (i.e. away from the preferred winter habitat of eucalyptus). By mid-March the spring passage of Allen's had mostly ended, but Rufous Hummingbirds were numerous. Two female Allen's Hummingbirds were found on nests at the 19th Street willows near the Santa Ana River mouth on 22 February (Gayle Benton, Hal Baxter *et al*). Swallows are our traditional early arrivals among the landbirds. The first **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** was found by David Bell at the Arcadia Arboretum on 5 February, and this species was widespread by mid-February, prospecting next sites along stream banks, both natural and artificial. Only Bank Swallows and Purple Martins were unrecorded by early March.

Another early spring transient, often nearly overlooked because of its rarity on the coastal slope, is the **Sage Thrasher**. Phil Sayre and Ed Navojosky had 12 Sage Thrashers east of Lancaster on 22 February, and a like number were there on 5 March (Jon Dunn *et al*). The wintering **Bendire's Thrasher** was still being seen near Ave. I and 100th St. East on these dates, with resident **Le Conte's Thrashers** providing a bonus.

An immature **Red-necked Grebe** was at Newport Harbor on 13 February (Brian Daniels), one of several reported in southern California this winter. **Black-vented Shearwaters** remained numerous offshore, with up to 200 of Pt. Dume as late as 19 March (Kimball Garrett). At least one **Short-tailed Shearwater** was seen off King Harbor, Redondo Beach, as late as 10 March (Jean Brandt, Peter Grant). A **Ross's Goose** was at El Dorado Park, Long Beach, on 12 March (Charles Collins), and the two at Pierce College in Woodland Hills remained with the **Canada Geese** until at least 26 February. A lone **White-faced Ibis** at Piute Ponds north of Lancaster on 5 March may have been a bird from the small flock that wintered there (Jon Dunn *et al*). There were several reports of the adult **Zone-tailed Hawk** near Fallbrook; this wintering bird is presumably the same individual as last year's bird.

The status of **Common Ground-Dove** in Los Angeles County is perplexing. This species is resident around orange groves and other bottomlands in Orange County (not far from the Los Angeles County border), in Ventura County (in the Camarillo area) and in western Riverside County. If anybody is aware of resident populations in Los Angeles County, we'd like to hear. At present, this species must be considered a rare spring, fall and winter vagrant. Fred Heath found the latest bird near the watercress ponds at Castaic Junction on 26 February, and rediscovered it on 11 March (other searchers were unsuccessful, causing rumors that April Fools had come early for our ex-editor this year!). It seemed that the unprecedented local winter "invasion" of **Vaux's Swifts** had died out soon after the Christmas Count period, but a rash of reports came in mid-March (our expected spring arrival date is in the first third of April). Some twenty birds were Elysian Park on 17 March (Lee Jones), twenty-five were over Topanga on 18 March (Kimball Garrett), and another twenty-five were over Exposition Park on 19 March (Kimball Garrett). Although we frequently see "yellow-winged" flickers locally in late fall and winter, birds showing the real **"Yellow-shafted Flicker"** phenotype are scarce; one such bird was at Mike San Miguel's yard in Arcadia on 20 February. A female **Williamson's Sapsucker** was at Chilao on 23 February and again on 2 March (Jean Brandt *et al*); this species is resident in small numbers in the high San Gabriel Mountains, but is encountered only infrequently elsewhere in the county. **Western Flycatchers** were in evidence by the second week of March (e.g. three on territory in Topanga on 11 March, with one found the previous day–Lee Jones). A wintering Western Flycatcher was at Veteran's Park in Long Beach from at least 11-27 February (Steve Ganley *et al*). The first **Western Kingbird** reported was at the Castaic Junction watercress ponds on 17 March (Kimball Garrett *et al*). Unusual in winter was an **Ash-throated Flycatcher**

at the 19th Street willows in Orange County 10 January to 13 February (Brian Daniels).

Townsend's Solitaires subsist almost exclusively on juniper berries through the winter season, buy they are occasionally recorded on the coastal slope where junipers do not grow. One was in Mike San Miguel's yard in Arcadia on 20 February, and another was in Chuck Murdoch's La Crescenta yard on 2 March. A **Solitary Vireo** in San Canyon Wash, Irvine, on 3 March (Doug Willick) was too early for a spring migrant. Three **"Plumbeous" solitary Vireos** were found by Brian Daniels in the Long Beach/San Pedro area, all presumably wintering. A **Warbling Vireo** at the Turtle Rock Nature Center on 1 March (Doug Willick) was undoubtedly a spring arrival; this is among our earliest foliage-gleaning migrants. A rare **Lucy's Warbler** was present from 25 February to 8+ March in Sand Canyon Wash (Doug Willick). A bright male **Yellow Warbler** in Placerita Canyon on 11 March (Hank and Priscilla Brodkin) was exceptionally early for a spring transient, but in an area where no wintering birds were known. Up to three **Hermit Warblers** were at Lake Sherwood on 20 February (Henry Childs); these were clearly wintering birds. A **Palm Warbler** was at the 19th Street Willows in Orange County from 13 February to at least the end of February (Brian Daniels). A bright alternate-plumaged **Palm Warbler** at the Castaic Junction watercress ponds on 11 March (Fred Heath) may have been wintering locally. Dan Guthrie's female **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** at the well-covered 19th Street willows on 16 December and on 19 February eluded other birders.

A final note for the period: California's first **Brambling** remained at its Crescent City feeder through at least the first week of March.

In many ways May marks the most exciting month of the birding year on southern California. Chances of out-of-range vagrants will increase greatly on birding outings as the month progresses, and by the end of the month a trip to an isolated desert oasis will almost certainly produce a series of interesting finds. The coastal canyons will be in full swing for lowland birds and well underway for birds in the mountains. There will be much for us to write in the next couple of months!

Send any interesting bird observations to:
Hal Baxter
1821 Highland Oaks Drive
Arcadia, CA 91006
Phone # (213) 355-6300

Upcoming Special Trips

WEEKEND, JUNE 9-10 — Kern River/Greenhorn Mountain Areas with **Bob Barnes.** Join this enthusiastic leader and see a wide variety of bird species (150 last year) in four distinctly different habitats. We'll look for Summer Tanagers, Indigo Buntings and Yellow-billed Cuckoos at the So. Fork Kern riparian, warblers and Blue Grouse in the Greenhorn Mr., Pinyon Jay, Gray Flycatcher and Williamson's Sapsucker on the Kern Plateau and possible Scott's Oriole and Bendire's Thrasher in the Joshua Tree-Kelso Creek area. (Send self-addressed stamped envelope, to LAAS, Attn. Marge Wohlgemuth, with $1 for copy of specific info on area by Mr. Barnes.) Motels and camping at Lake Isabella. (Meeting time and directions next month)

WEEKEND, JULY 7-8 — Sequoia National Park: Saturday—Mineral King Area with George San Miguel and Sunday—Giant Forest Area with Larry Norris. See beautiful areas, some wildflowers, and lovely vistas while looking for Pileated Woodpecker, Winter Wren, Dipper and other nesting mountain birds. Be prepared to drive over curvey high mountain roads, particularly for Mineral King area. Suggest camping or motels in the Three Rivers area for close access to meeting areas. Maximum participants: 20; $15 per person

WEEKEND, JULY 28-29, Creighton Ranch, Tulare Lake Basin and Sequoia National Forest. Join two of San Joaquin Valley's top birders, **Rob Hanson** and **Bob Barnes** for a unique weekend. We'll spend one day in the Jack Flat area of Sequoia looking for Pileated Woodpecker, Townsends' Solitaire and other mountain birds. We'll spend the other day in search of landbirds such as Blue Grosbeaks, Mr. Plover, Vesper Sparrow, and Short-eared owl, continuing on to the Tulare Lake Basin (where we have been granted special access permission) to see hundreds and thousands of breeding White Pelicans, Snowy & Great Egrets, Eared and both W. Grebes Wilsons Phalaropes, Black crowned night herons and smaller numbers of stilts, avocets and even a possible Little Blue Heron. we'll find an area to relax in the middle of the day, continuing at perhaps the Kern Wildlife Refuge depending on the bird distribution. Be prepared for one day of high, dry heat. Suggest camping at Creighton Ranch or moteling at Porterville. Maximum participants: 30; $20 per person

Policy for Paid Reservations

Reservation priority will be given to those first meeting the following requirements: Include: (1) Event desired; (2) Check to LAAS for exact amount per event; (3) Names of people in your party; (4) Phone numbers —(a) usual and (b) evening before event in case of emergency cancellation (5) self-addressed, stamped envelope, for confirmation and associated event information. Send to:

Reservations Chairman, Ruth Lohr, LAAS
7377 Santa Monica Blvd., L.A. 90046.

If there is insufficient response, the event will be cancelled two weeks before the scheduled date and you will be notified; otherwise no refunds during the last two weeks unless there is a paid replacement.

CARPOOLING: Let's try to use conservation measures to reduce gasoline consumption and prevent additional air pollution whenever possible; keep in mind it costs 20¢ a mile for a typical car!

Wildflower Hotline

The Theodore Payne Foundation is once again offering its wildflower telephone hotline service, the floral equivalent of our weekly bird report. To find out what flowers are coming up where, call (818) 768-3533. Just like our tape, the information is updated on Thursday for weekend tripping. Areas covered include the Santa Monica Mountains, Anza-Borrego, Joshua Tree and other high desert areas, and the Antelope Valley. Visitors are welcome at the Foundation headquarters and nursery at 10459 Tuxford St. in Sun Valley, where native plants can be seen blooming in season.

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for the Executive Committee
1984 - 1985

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1st Vice President: ..... Ellsworth Kendig
2nd Vice President: ..... Robert Brault
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Recording Secretary: ..... Marilyn Cooper
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WESTERN TANAGER

EDITOR Dexter Kelly
DESIGN Keith Lee
PRINTER Artisan Press
CONSERVATION EDITOR Sandy Wohlgemuth
ORNITHOLOGY CONSULTANT Kimball Garrett

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1st VICE PRESIDENT Ellsworth Kendig
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Audubon membership (local and national) is $30 per year (individual), $38 (family), $15 (student) or $17 (senior citizen), including AUDUBON Magazine and THE WESTERN TANAGER. To join, make checks payable to the National Audubon Society, and send them to Audubon House at the above address. Members wishing to receive the TANAGER by first class mail must send checks for $5 to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

Subscriptions to THE WESTERN TANAGER separately are $8 per year (Bulk Rate) or $13 (First Class, mailed in an envelope). To subscribe, make checks payable to Los Angeles Audubon Society.

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CALENDAR

Field Trips

FRIDAY, MAY 4 — Chatsworth Park South. Meet **Allan Keller** at 8 a.m. to look for Orioles, Warblers and Grosbeaks. Go to end of Devonshire, west of Topanga Cyn. Blvd.; drive to parking lot near Rec. Center.

SUNDAY, MAY 6 — Placerita Canyon Park. Join **Jacob Szabo** (854-0121) to see a good variety of resident birds and search for migrants. Take Placerita Canyon Rd. off Hwy. 14 to Park and meet at Nature Center entrance at 8 a.m. Bring water and snack to bird till about 1 p.m.

MONDAY, MAY 7 — Ojai Loop Trip. Join **Guy and Louise Commeau** at 8 a.m. in search of migrants along the Ventura River riparian area; W. Flycatchers, Hutton's Vireos and Purple Finches in the live oak grove and wide variety at other stops including Matilija Lake and Lake Casitas. Go North on 101 toward, turning inland on Rte. 33, exiting at Foster Park. Meet beyond bridge of Ventura R. in Park. Bring lunch and plan to carpool. Camping available at Foster Park. Carpoolers* may also wish to meet under the overpass at the Valley Circle offramp of 101 in Woodland Hills by **6:30 a.m. (info: Wanda 340-0365)**

TUESDAY, MAY 8: Evening Meeting at 8:00 p.m. in Plummer Park. Naturalist **Ron Hansen**, Manager of the Nature Conservancy's Creighton Ranch and Kaweah Oaks Preserves, will present a slide film show on **Birds of the Tulare Basin: Then and Now**, an account of the changing birdlife of this fascinating area, which will be the goal of the one of our special field trips (see inside).

SATURDAY, MAY 12 — Tujunga Wash, Hansen Dam Park. Meet **Mary Carmona** at 8 a.m. to look for the Roadrunner, Phainopepla, Cactus Wren and possible migrants. Meet by the bridge of Tujunga Wash on Foothill Blvd. two miles west of Sunland. Bring lunch.

SATURDAY, MAY 12 — Mojave Narrows Regional Park. Meet **Ruth Lohr** and **Ed Navojosky** at 8:30 a.m. at the 800 acre desert oasis in search of Ladderback Woodpecker, Summer Tanager, Gambel's Quail, Lazuli Bunting, Vermillion Flycatcher, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Vireos, Warblers, etc. Take Hwy. 15 toward Victorville exiting at Bear Valley; go east 3.9 miles to Ridge Crest Rd; turn left 2.6 miles to park entrance. Meet at first parking lot on left. ($2 Fee day or weekend camping; fishing more) Approximately 2 hours from L.A. Bring lunch.

SUNDAY, MAY 13 — Whittier Narrows Reg. Park. David White will lead his monthly morning walk alongside the San Gabriel River, through a chaparral area and to the New Lakes. Look for Yellow-Breasted Chat, Orioles, Warblers, Vireos, & Flycatchers in addition to chaparral birds, raptors and waterbirds. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Nature Center, 1000 Durfee Ave., So. El Monte, near crossing freeways 10 and 60.

SUNDAY, MAY 20 — Covington Park/Morongo Valley Reguge. David Koeppel (478-8659) will lead the search for specialties, such as Lucy's Warbler, Brown-Crested and Vermillion Flycatchers, Cassin's Kingbirds, Blue Grosbeaks and other migrants. Take Hwy. 10 east to Hwy. 62; go north 10 miles to park sign and go right to park. Meet at 7:30 a.m. near Park Rec. Center. Bring lunch. Camping/Motels available in Yucca Valley. Approximately 3 hours from L.A.

MONDAY, MAY 21 — Reptile and Birding Trip to Antelope Valley, Devil's Punchbowl and Placerita, Cyn. Park with **Harvey Fischer,** Reptile Curator, L.A. Zoo. We'll search for desert lizards and other reptiles and enjoy the spring flowers, birds and other wildlife. Be prepared to carpool* from Placerita Nature Center by 8:30 a.m. Bring lunch and liquids. (info: Wanda Conway 340-0365)

SATURDAY, MAY 26 — Big Sycamore Cyn., Pt. Mugu State Park. Join **Harriet Bennish** (659-0604) for this beginners' morning walk looking at resident chaparral birds, Orioles and other migrants. Meet outside entrance, 20 miles north of Malibu on PCH at 8 a.m. Bring lunch for after walk, if you wish.

WEEKEND, JUNE 30-JULY 1 — Audubon Picnic/Campout: Table Mountain in the San Gabriels — if everything works out. Details in June Tanager.

*CARPOOLING: Let's try to use conservation measures to reduce gasoline consumption and prevent air pollution whenever possible; besides it costs 20¢ a mile for a typical car.

Please call 874-1318 prior to each trip for possible special instructions or unexpected changes that may occur, at least through Thursday.

Audubon Bird Reports*

Los Angeles	(213) 874-1318
San Bernardino	(714) 793-5599
Santa Barbara	(805) 964-8240
San Diego	(619) 435-6761

Los Angeles Audubon Headquarters, Library, Bookstore and Nature Museum are located at Audubon House, Plummer Park, 7377 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046. Telephone: (213) 876-0202. Hours: 10-3, Tuesday through Saturday.

Pelagic Trips

Monday, MAY 14 — Horned Puffin trip. Santa Barbara Island and out to sea. Depart 6 a.m., return 6 p.m. Price is $22 per person — NO discount for 2.

Sunday, AUGUST 12 — Shearwater and storm petrel trip. Santa Barbara Island and out to sea. Depart 6:00 a.m., return 6:00 p.m. Price is $22 per person. NO discount for 2.

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 23 — Red-billed Tropic-Bird Trip. San Clemente Island Depart 5:30 a.m., return 6:00 p.m. Leaders to be announced. Price is $25 per person.

All trips will be on the *Vantuna,* leaving from Terminal Island, San Pedro. All prices are tentative and subject to fuel cost increases. Reserve spaces early. To take part in these pelagic trips, send your reservations with the names and telephone numbers of all members of your party along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to Reservations c/o Ruth Lohr, Los Angeles Audubon Society (see address at left). There is no galley on board, so bring lunch and fluids.

Shearwater Trips

Sat. July 28	Monterey Seavelley & Ascension Canyon Chandik/tba	$27
Sat. Aug. 4	Cordell Banks leader tba	$37
Sat. Aug. 11	Monterey Seavalley & Ascension Canyon Allison/Baldridge	$27
Sat. Aug. 18	Monterey Bay Baldridge/Chandik	$27
Wed. Aug. 22	Monterey Bay Shearwater/tba	$25
Sat. Aug. 25	Monterey Seavalley & Ascension Canyon Baldridge/Chandik	$27
Sun. Aug. 26	Monterey Bay leaders tba	$27
Wed. Aug. 29	Monterey Bay Shearwater/tba	$25
Thurs. Aug. 30	Monterey Bay Shearwater/tba	$25
Fri. Aug. 31	Monterey Bay Shearwater/tba	$25

Reservations are made by sending a check payable to Debra Love Shearwater, 362 Lee St., Santa Cruz 95060 (408) 425-8111. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Los Angeles Audubon Society
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